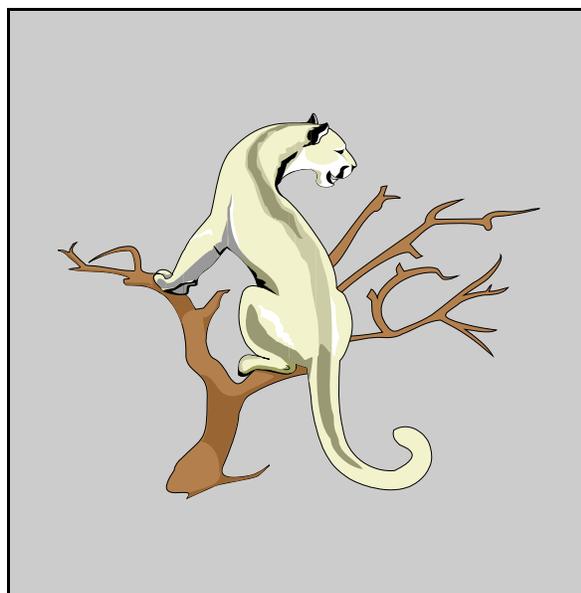


Chapter 2

Area and Community Attractions and Services

I. Natural Resources

The Colorado River corridor from the Loma Boat Launch to the Utah state line is generally known as Ruby Canyon. This corridor is the heart of the 118,700 acre Ruby Canyon/Black Ridge ecosystem. It includes rolling, saltbush covered hills, pinyon-juniper and sagebrush-covered mesas, a 20 mile stretch of the Colorado River nominated by the BLM for National Scenic River designation, and over 70,000 acres of sheer-sided, red-rock canyons, natural arches, caves and alcoves.



A. Wildlife

The Ruby Canyon/Black Ridge ecosystem displays its health in the wide variety of wildlife who are still at home here. Some, like the desert bighorn sheep, peregrine falcon, humpback chub, razorback sucker, and squawfish have lost their hold in other places. But they still exist in Ruby Canyon. Others, like the Scott's Oriole, find suitable nesting habitat here at the very edge of their range. The abundance of other forms of wildlife reflects the rich mixture of habitats available (see map 3 page 2-3).

The BLM assisted the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) and the National Park Service in recovery programs for Desert Bighorn Sheep (see Appendix A) and peregrine falcons. In the three years of 1979, 1980, and 1981, the two agencies released 36 sheep into Monument and Devils Canyons. Collaring bighorns and annual monitoring show that today's bighorn population is around 75. This population has allowed for hunting mature rams since 1988. A total of 18 half-curl or better rams have been harvested.

The BLM also participated with the CDOW in the Peregrine Recovery Project, bringing the population back from the brink of extinction. Reduced eggshell thicknesses in the years the pesticide DDT was used made it impossible for peregrines to successfully hatch their young. Scientists and volunteers removed the eggs, replaced them with plastic imitations, hatched the young, and then returned them to their nests. Today there are four nesting pairs of peregrines in the Ruby Canyon Corridor raising an average of almost two fledglings per nest each year. In the summer, volunteers and employees search the skies above the canyon rims to glimpse these swift birds, recording their locations and health. Any potentially disturbing activities near the eyries are prohibited during nesting season. BLM biologists believe the Ruby Canyon corridor would also provide excellent habitat for other sensitive species. Candidates for reintroduction are the black footed ferret, in Rabbit Valley.

From 10 to 20 bald eagles can be found in Horsethief and Ruby Canyons any day along the river between December 15 and March 15. One large night roost has been found and single and double occupancy type roosts have been observed along the river in Ruby Canyon. In the late 1970's a pair of bald eagles began staying the summers below Westwater Canyon in Utah. In 1988 the decade of effort by that couple paid off with a new pair of bald eagles nesting up river at Westwater next to the Colorado state line. Finally in Ruby Canyon a pair of bald eagles nested in the summer of 1995 and again in 1996 producing two fledglings each time.

An active peregrine eyrie was discovered in Ruby Canyon in June 1986 on the north side of the river. They fledged young in eight out of the past 10 years. In 1988 the pair adopted a cliff on the south side of the river. At the spacing of four miles between pairs there is room for three more pairs of peregrine falcons in the area. In 1991 a pair settled downstream and a second pair in 1995 downstream from them. In 1996 the first Ruby Canyon pair disappeared early, but a pair showed up with fledged young upstream.

The needs of the Colorado River System's endemic fishes seem to be accommodated at least marginally in this area between Loma Bend and Utah Line Railroad Siding. Black Rocks in Ruby Canyon is a deep channel stretch of the river vital to maintaining the humpback, and perhaps, bonytail chubs.

An endemic fish present in the Colorado River that is believed to be more endangered than the squawfish is the razorback sucker. The razorback sucker is listed an endangered species and like the others, the river through Ruby Canyon is listed as critical habitat for them.

WILDLIFE HABITAT MAP

Other species of special concern that do or may occur in the planning area include the kit fox (desert and sparse juniper), western yellow-billed cuckoo (cottonwood riparian), spotted bat (cliffs), the southern spotted owl (canyons as Mesa Verde and Canyonlands National Parks), canyon treefrog, night snake (McDonald Creek, north side of the river), and western yellow-bellied racer (north side of the river south of Mack).

The golden eagles are of special concern and protected by the Bald Eagle Act. Other raptors that have been found are turkey vulture, Coopers hawk (nest), red-tailed hawk, prairie falcon, American kestrel, great horned owl, long-eared owl, western screech owl. Three other birds species present that are at the periphery of their ranges, and as such considered sensitive are the Cassin's kingbird, gray vireo, and as mentioned above, the Scott's oriole.

No listed species of plant has been identified within the area. Neither has a plant association of special concern been delineated here. However, the sensitive plant Lomatium latilobum, occurs along Rattlesnake Canyon. Rare plants including Amsonia jonesii, and Cryptantha osterhoutii are both known to be north of the river and the latter also found south of the river.

B. Vegetation

The planning area consists of a wide variety of plant communities and vegetation types. In the lower elevations north of the Colorado River the salt desert plant community dominates with a scattering of pinyon-juniper mesa tops. Three varieties of salt bush and other various shrubs occupy this area along with a blend of forbs and grasses. This diverse community provides vital habitat for an antelope population. Most areas that have been disturbed in some way or another in the past contain a substantial composition of cheatgrass. Fire, livestock grazing and recreation are the major activities or disturbances that have influenced the plant communities north of the river.

Riparian vegetation characterizes the Colorado River Corridor. Cottonwood galleries located on the floodplain are interspersed along the river amongst the willow, skunkbush or tamarisk dominated stream banks. The non-native tamarisk is now a significant component of the riparian community and either co-dominates or completely dominates many stream banks. Changes in the hydrology of the river, mainly flow rates due to upstream dams and irrigation is thought to be the main reason for this invasion, not direct uses along the river. Escaped fire from recreation use has been a major factor in the decline of the cottonwood community and the increase in salt cedar and knapweed, another aggressive invader. Beaver activity and recreation use are other notable impacts to the riparian system.

Vegetation south of the river ranges from the salt desert type along the river to higher elevation pinyon-juniper canyons and mesas and sagebrush parks. The composition of pinyon-juniper varies from very dense stands of trees only to low - moderate amounts with a diverse understory of shrubs, forbs and grasses. These low to moderate density areas are important bighorn sheep habitat, especially as travel corridors. Sagebrush parks are scattered through this zone at various altitudes and with varying degrees of sagebrush density. The sagebrush component is vital for deer winter habitat. Some sagebrush parks support a high composition of crested wheatgrass, a result of plowing and seeding in the 1950 and 1960's. Fire, livestock grazing and historical vegetation treatments have been the major influences affecting the plant communities south of the river. Fire referenced here includes not only the direct influence of fire but also fire suppression efforts in the past. Fire suppression removes a natural disturbance from the system and thus removes a natural means of changing plant communities.

In 1993 an intensive vegetative inventory know as an Ecological Site Inventory (ESI) was completed for the area (see Upland ESI map found in Envelope). ESI provides a detailed description for an area in terms of species present and the percent composition and production of each. Once completed, we have very specific knowledge about the types of soils, the vegetation and the landscape. This information enables land managers to discover the natural potential of the land, its current ecological status and the difference between the two (see Ecological Condition Classes Map 4 - page 2-6). History of an area can help explain why it looks the way it does which can aid in predicting the anticipated results of various activities or disturbances.

Based on this knowledge, we can determine a site's capability for supporting a variety of plant and animal life. For example, through natural succession, a pinyon-juniper forest may have taken over what was once a grassland, reducing the availability of forage for livestock and grassland wildlife. Based on an understanding of the soils, vegetation and climate, we may know that this area has the potential for providing more grasses, and can make a management decision to remove some of the trees. In other instances, the inventory may tell us that an area has already met its potential for supporting plantlife, and that the natural potential community is, in fact, a pinyon-juniper woodland. Changes in those cases may be counter-productive. Decisions of this sort are made based on what land managers and the public would like the "desired plant community" to be.

II. Land Status

The planning area for the Ruby Canyon/Black Ridge plan encompasses 118,625 acres of land, 110,234 acres management by the BLM, 1,620 acres of Bureau of Reclamation land managed by CDOW (Horsethief State Wildlife Area), and 6,771 acres of privately-owned land (see map, page vii).

ECOLOGICAL CONDITION CLASSES MAP

III. Cultural and Paleontological Resources

A. Cultural Resources

For over 10,000 years, the Ruby Canyon area has provided people with the necessities of life. The earliest human occupation of the area began about 9,500 B.C. and is called the Paleo-Indian Period. These early big-game hunters are designated by archaeologists as the Clovis Tradition. As the climate continued to change at the end of the last Ice Age, two other Paleo-Indian traditions appeared in the area, and are known as the Folsom and Plano Traditions.

About 5,500 B.C. a series of severe droughts occurred in the western United States which radically altered the way the prehistoric peoples adapted to the environment. The very large grazing animals became extinct and were gradually replaced by the animals and plants present today. The prehistoric Native Americans responded to the great droughts by migration, some of their populations moving out of the lower elevations of the Great Basin to the west, and the Great Plains to the east, and relocating at the higher elevations of the Colorado Plateau and the Southern Rocky Mountains. They diversified their hunting and gathering skills to include a wider range of plant and animal species. The increased use of grass seeds and other plants seeds resulted in the development of grinding stones to process the seeds. Archaeologists call this the Early Archaic Period.

Around 3,500 B.C. the climate changed again, becoming cooler and wetter. This allowed for the expansion of the pinyon forest across vast stretches of the Colorado Plateau. The pine nuts from the pinyon trees provided a larger more reliable food source allowing the prehistoric Indian populations to expand and grow. A rich environment of diverse species of plants and animals developed on the Uncompahgre Plateau, of which the RCBR is a part, as well as in the surrounding areas. Archaeologists call this the Middle Archaic Period. Because of this rich environment, numerous prehistoric groups passed through the area. Due to the confluence of the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers, the Grand Junction area became a crossroads between the Colorado Plateau and the Southern Rocky Mountains.

About 1,000 B.C. the climate changed again, becoming much like it is today. Corn had been domesticated in Mexico and this new crop resource slowly worked its way north to the southwestern United States. Though corn had reached west-central Colorado by around 250 B.C., it was not readily adopted by the people living here at the time. Archaeologists call this the Late Archaic Period, which lasted until about 300 A.D. The bow and arrow appears here after about 300 A.D.

Adoption of corn horticulture by many groups eventually resulted in the development of the Anasazi in the Mesa Verde area of the Four Corners region of Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah. Through contact with the Anasazi, some local Archaic groups began to practice corn horticulture when and where they could. This mixture of hunting and gathering supplemented by the growing of corn became what archaeologists call the Fremont culture. They are marked by their own distinctive forms of architecture, ceramics, and rock art.

Around 1300 to 1400 A.D. the Fremont culture fades from the archaeological record to be replaced by the people we eventually come to know as the historic Ute tribe. The Utes were the dominant tribal group in the area until their removal by the U.S. Cavalry in 1880, thus opening up the area to American settlement.

For the Fremont Indians and others, the cliffs provided shelter, and the numerous small creeks provided water for them and the plants and animals they ate. More recently settlers have passed through the area, grazing livestock, constructing railroads, and exploring for minerals. Evidence of these early and later inhabitants can be readily found. Fremont rock art is painted or pecked onto the walls of many canyons, and the floors of overhangs where they found shelter, still bear traces of their fires, tools and meals. Sometimes in close proximity to these prehistoric sites are 100 year old railroad camps. Each site reveals special information about the lives of our predecessors.

The sweeping views from the ridge tops and majestic canyon walls must have inspired the same awe and reverence most people experience today, making the canyons a special place to call home. In protecting these sites, the BLM's objective is to preserve this experience, and to provide visitors an opportunity to discover something new about themselves and their past. The best example of this is McDonald Creek Canyon in Rabbit Valley, a 1,144-acre cultural resource management area singled out because of its high concentration for rock art and living sites. The BLM's management of this area ensures that visitors will experience the area much as it was when prehistoric people lived there. The canyon is pristine with no obtrusive signs pointing to rock art locations, and the only trail is a dry, sandy creek bottom leading to the Colorado River. As an educational resource, McDonald Creek Canyon is used to teach students about how to protect the remnants of their past. Each spring, the BLM archaeologist takes students on trips down the canyon, showing them the plants and animals the Indians would have eaten and where they would have lived.

In the past, authorities believed the best protection for such sites was keeping them secret. However, the Grand Junction Resource Area has found that visitors to McDonald Creek act as a sort of "Neighborhood Watch" program, discouraging destructive behavior. Photos taken in 1978 are used as a benchmark to monitor how well management is working. Evidence of success can be found in the fact that fewer pre-historic sites in the Grand Junction Resource Area are being vandalized today.

This technique of management through education will be used when the BLM develops a specific management plan for Sieber Canyon in the southern portion of the Ruby Canyon area.

B. Paleontological Resources

Imagine this area as it was 140 million years ago, not as a high desert, but as a semi-arid, vast floodplain with some lakes and low hills covered by giant conifer and cycad trees. The weather was warm and humid. Crocodiles and turtles lived in the ponds, lakes, stream, rivers and swamps and dinosaurs roamed about.

We can paint this vivid picture of Ruby Canyon's Jurassic Age because of the fossils found here. Over millions of years, rivers, streams, lakes and seas eroded entire mountain ranges and deposited thousands of feet of sediment. Remnants of plants, dinosaurs, and other fossils were trapped in these sediments and were turned to rock by the immense heat and pressure of the rock layers above them. Modern day erosion has exposed some of these fossils once again, and scientists study them and their locations to learn more about our prehistory (see map 5, next page). Significant paleontological areas depicted on the map are those areas known to contain high concentration of paleontological resources.

Special paleontological management areas, Fruita Paleontological Area, Dinosaur Hill and Rabbit Valley Research Natural Areas are local areas with on-going research and interpretation activities.

There are a number of very important concentrations of fossils within the Ruby Canyon area where scientists have discovered fossils unlike any others. On a ridge in the Black Ridge WSA, fossils of the oldest known flower have been found and at the Fruita Paleontology Area and at the active Mygatt-Moore Quarry in Rabbit Valley, dinosaur and other remains have been excavated which have changed the way scientists look at those species.

The protection, excavation, and exploration of these sites is made possible through cooperation with the Museum of Western Colorado and Dinamation International Society. Both the Fruita Paleontology Area and the Mygatt-Moore Quarry have been designated as Research Natural Areas and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern to protect the existing landscape and provide for continued scientific research. Each summer, both the Museum and Dinamation sponsor and train groups of volunteers to perform the tedious task of uncovering fragile fossils. As many as 300 volunteers come each year, some from as far away as Japan, and many pay tuition as part of an educational tour.

PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES MAP
(MISSING)

Each year, as many as 10,000 people stop at the Mygatt-Moore Quarry and travel the mile and a half Trail Through Time where fossil remains can be seen in place. The trail's interpretive brochures and signs are a cooperative effort of the Museum, Dinamation and the BLM. In the future these efforts will be expanded to include interpretive tours for visitors passing through the area, and a small facility has been suggested as well.

All excavation is done under permits issued by the BLM to universities and museums. Through a contract with the BLM, the Museum of Western Colorado curates artifacts and fossils, ensuring they are available to the scientific community for research. Throughout the Ruby Canyon area, clearances for paleontology and cultural resources are required before beginning any project or activity.

IV. Traditional Uses

Agriculture, ranching and mineral exploration have played a significant role in developing the culture of the Grand Valley. Local residents have a closeness to the land that is typical of western communities where survival itself often depends on the whims of nature.

Today, ranchers still rely on the Ruby Canyon area to provide forage for their herds. The area includes 16 grazing allotments (see map #6, page 2-13) used primarily in the winter and early spring, before livestock can be moved to higher elevations. While these allotments are integral to ranching operations, over time, ranchers have modified their operations to reduce impacts on other resources. For example, under current agreement with grazing permittees in the WSA, grazing has been excluded from Rattlesnake, Mee and Knowles Canyons to enhance riparian habitat. Grazing has also been eliminated from the Colorado River Allotment to protect riparian vegetation and scenic values. Combined with the areas excluded in the Mountain Island Allotment to protect cryptogamic soils, approximately one-third of the WSA is not being grazed. Further, some historic sheep allotments have been voluntarily converted to cattle use by ranchers to provide greater protection for the reintroduced desert bighorn sheep population. In some instances livestock grazing is coordinated with intense recreation use to avoid conflict.

Livestock operators and the BLM are working closely with other public land users to develop vegetative goals that not only meet the needs of the operator but also others as well. These common goals can provide for improved wildlife habitat and watershed conditions as well as scenic values. Grazing is used as one of the tools to accomplish these goals. The BLM continues to work with ranchers to protect the landscape and those they share it with. Allotments are monitored closely to ensure that conflicts between users are minimal.

Mineral exploration in the area has left some roads and a few test holes, however, miners have since left the area, having found little of value. Since protection of wildlife habitat, scenic values, and recreational opportunities is the BLM's primary focus here, the entire Ruby Canyon corridor south to the edge of the Black Ridge WSA has been withdrawn from mineral entry. North of the river any exploration and entry is subject to appropriate restrictions on use of the land.

V. Recreational Resources

Recreation is the fastest growing use of our public lands today. These lands provide an important outlet for our increasingly urban societies and bring tourist dollars to those communities fortunate enough to be located near them.

Visitor use of the Ruby Canyon Area has increased dramatically over the past 10 years. Visitors have requested a wide variety of recreational opportunities, from very structured to undeveloped. To respond to these needs, and to protect fragile resources, the BLM's focus here has been to provide primitive recreation experiences south of the Colorado River, and more developed recreation opportunities to the north. Within the area there are three concentrations of use.

A. The River

The Colorado River corridor from the Loma Boat Launch to the Utah state line is generally known as Ruby Canyon. Floatboating is the dominant public use; however, about five percent of use involves motorboats. Of the floatboating use, about 25 percent is canoe/kayak oriented, and 75 percent is by inflatable raft. About 655 of the floatboaters spend one or more nights on the river with 35 percent of them continuing on through adjacent Westwater Canyon in Utah. Along with shoreline camping, hiking the side canyons south of the river is a popular activity. Ruby Canyon is considered flatwater (Class I) and Westwater Canyon in Utah contains major whitewater rapids (Class III+).

At present, about 33 percent of the floatboating use is conducted by commercial river outfitters. A majority of the commercial trips continue on through Westwater Canyon. The remaining 66 percent of floatboating use is by private boaters, in numerous, typically smaller groups. In most years, floatboating does occur in February and November, but the primary boating season is April through October.

GRAZING ALLOTMENT MAP
(MISSING)

Most of the motorboat use is by sportsmen and is highest during fall waterfowl hunting season. Motorboats are also used for deer hunting and spring/fall catfish fishing.

Each year, an average of 6,000 people float the 25 mile section of the Colorado River through Ruby Canyon. Most come from other towns in Colorado or from out of state. Almost 40 percent of these people are floating the canyon for the first time.

The BLM's goals for the area have been to provide a safe, accessible launch site and a primitive recreation setting through Ruby Canyon. A map was developed to show boaters where to camp, encouraging them to use low impact techniques, and to provide information on possible hazards and rapids. Throughout the busy seasons, BLM field personnel assist visitors at the Loma Launch Site, patrol the river, organize river cleanups, and conduct studies to determine trends in visitor use and the level of impacts. The launch site and sanitary facilities are cooperatively maintained with the CDOW and the BLM continues to work on increasing the size of the facility to accommodate additional use.

B. Rabbit Valley

In Colorado, well over half of all recreational use on BLM lands occurs on 15 percent of the land base. In the Grand Junction Resource Area, Rabbit Valley is the best example of this. The valley is just 30 minutes from Grand Junction, and I-70 provides easy access to this relatively remote area. In addition, Rabbit Valley is generally snow-free, attracting fall, winter and spring use when other areas are not accessible. Recreation use here has tripled in the last five years, requiring the BLM to implement more intensive management. This has involved identifying designated trail routes that direct the public to appropriate areas and providing facilities to protect resources.

To protect erosive soils, the BLM developed three group use camping areas with picnic tables and toilets, as well as a parking area large enough for horse and off-highway-vehicle (OHV) trailers. With the assistance of the Motorcycle Trail Riding Association, the BLM inventoried and designated trails for OHV use, rehabilitated those that were closed, and developed a map and interpretive brochure to educate visitors about where to go and how to preserve the area. The brochure is part of BLM's policy to educate users, and is supplemented on site by bulletin boards, signing and patrols and visitor contacts by the BLM Ranger and staff. Our "Pack-Your-Trash" program keeps the area clean, and reduces maintenance spending. The current management program is being monitored to ensure success, so a variety of recreational users can continue to enjoy this area.

C. Trails

When recreation use begins to threaten fragile resources, the BLM's Grand Junction Resource Area has a history of working with recreational users to find new outlets, rather than prohibiting use. The trails constructed over the last 10 years in the Ruby Canyon are evidence of this.

In 1989 mountain bikes were beginning their first surge of popularity and local riders began looking for new places to travel. The lower reaches of some pristine canyons in the WSA began to feel the strain of this new use. To protect these areas, the BLM met with local mountain bikers to find more suitable areas. The result was the development and construction of Kokopelli's Mountain Bike Trail. Hundreds of volunteers worked with the BLM to connect 138 miles of old four-wheel drive roads and stretches of single track leading from the Loma Boat Launch to Moab, Utah. The BLM also worked with the local mountain bike organization to sign portions of the trail as loops. Today, an average of 15,000 to 16,000 riders use these loops each year. Of those registering at the trail heads in 1995, 39 percent were from outside Mesa County, bringing in important tourist dollars to the local economy. Other bike trails have been developed, such as the Horsethief Bench Loop with local volunteer support and labor.

Other trails have been built to respond to public demand while protecting the landscape. These include trails in the WSA to Rattlesnake Arches, and Knowles and Jones Canyons. Rabbit's Ear Trail was completed in October of 1992, built with the help of the Sierra Club to a river overlook in Rabbit Valley (see map 7 next page).

Estimated public recreation use of Black Ridge and Ruby Canyon are shown below for 1995:

<u>Black Ridge</u>	<u>Visits</u>	<u>Visitor Days</u>
Deer Hunting	550	1,350
Day Hiking	7,900	7,900
Backpacking	550	1,650
Mountain biking	2,900	2,900
Off-Highway Vehicle (to Arches)	2,300	2,300
Horseback Riding	375	375
TOTAL	14,575	16,475

EXISTING ROADS AND TRAILS
(MISSING)

Ruby Canyon

Floatboating		6,000	10,000
Motorboating	1,000		1,300
Shoreline Camping		4,500	4,500
Fishing		500	500
Waterfowl Hunting		700	700
TOTAL		12,700	17,000

In all of the above areas and public land uses, it is safe to say that most uses are growing at least by five percent per year. Some notable exceptions include more rapid growth in mountain biking and all terrain vehicle use, a leveling off in deer hunting use, and reduced off-highway vehicle use in the study area resulting from recent closures inside the WSA.

D. Wilderness

Since 1974, the BLM has managed the 73,937-acre Black Ridge Canyons WSA (two WSAs combined into one unit) south of the Colorado River to preserve its wilderness characteristics (see map 8 page 2-19). The area was recommended to the President for wilderness designation in 1991, after intensive inventory and study of the area. In 1993, the President endorsed the area for wilderness designation and passed his recommendation onto Congress.

The Black Ridge Canyons WSA would be a significant addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System. Although close to an urban area, the WSA is very natural in character with few imprints of man. The area provides an environmental benchmark from which similar, but more intensively used areas can be compared. There are seven major canyons within the WSA that cut 500 to 1,000 feet into the Uncompahgre Plateau. Each canyon is characterized by deep main canyons with several secondary canyons. Hidden among these canyons are giant sandstone arches, amphitheater-like alcoves and caves and Precambrian granite outcrops which have created spectacular waterfalls and drop pools. Some of the canyons have narrow chasms while others are up to a half-mile wide. Between them are rambling mesas, sloping downward to the Colorado River.

The BLM has managed this area to preserve the experience of stepping back to a time before development when settlers arrived in the Grand Valley. It has also been managed to provide outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. The number of canyons allow visitors to disperse throughout

the WSA. Opportunities for solitude within a single canyon system are accentuated by isolation provided by the benches at various levels above the canyon floor. The broad expanses of the mesas, excellent topographic and vegetative screening, and the large size and configuration of the WSA all enhance outstanding opportunities for solitude.

The Black Ridge Canyons WSA provides outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in close proximity to the populated Grand Valley. The WSA's outstanding scenery and landscape variety, interesting geologic features, extensive canyon systems, the Colorado River and cultural and paleontological resources contribute to outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation in the WSA. Topographic diversity, unusual geologic features such as arches, spires and windows, and intermittent water courses all appeal to visitors. Along with hiking and backpacking, their activities in the WSA include picnicking, viewing outstanding scenery, horseback riding, photography, birdwatching, hunting and rock hounding.

In 1995, almost 14,000 recreationists visited the area to hike, backpack, horseback ride and photograph the area's outstanding scenery. Although the area's visitation continues to increase, the WSA's topography and vegetation allow visitors to disperse and be effectively screened from one another. The BLM has developed a low impact-trail system to help visitors disperse, explore and enjoy the area.

Rattlesnake Canyon is the most well known of the WSA's because of its concentration of natural sandstone arches. The visitor to Arches National Park has a very structured experience while the visitor to Rattlesnake Canyon is provided an opportunity to explore and discover in a non-motorized, natural setting.

BLM continues to improve the trailheads into the WSA. In 1993, a wilderness brochure was developed for the visitor to assist with information and access to the area. Protection of the wilderness resource is the major emphasis of ongoing education efforts.

Devils Canyon and Flume Canyon were blocked to public access up until their recent acquisition. In 1992, BLM acquired private lands being sub-divided in the mouth of Devils Canyon. In 1996, BLM acquired 320 acres in lower Flume Canyon.

WILDERNESS STUDY AREA MAP
(MISSING)

The Black Ridge Canyons WSA consists of 73,937 acres and is considered by BLM to be one of the most outstanding WSAs in Colorado. All of the lands acquired (320 acres) in Flume Canyon and 200 acres of the lands in Devils Canyon would qualify for wilderness as contiguous parcels to the WSA. These parcels are natural in character and have canyon topography and vegetation similar to the contiguous WSA. These parcels would enhance the adjacent canyons as they provide an integral part of the canyon ecosystem. And although these small parcels by themselves do not possess outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, they do enhance these opportunities in the contiguous WSA (see Appendix G - Acquired Lands Considered for Wilderness).

Supplemental values for these additional parcels include their proximity to the Colorado National Monument, a large urban population, wildlife values, geologic values, and cultural and paleontological values. More detailed information is available in the Wilderness Intensive Inventory for the Black Ridge Canyons WSA.